



Ref. A09139

MR WHITMORE

The Sloan Affair

Attached — With my minute of 27 July (Ref. A09116) I sent you a memorandum reporting on the verification of the notes of discussion between Mr Geoffrey Sloan and Mr Clive Abbott of the Northern Ireland Office. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland would like to give a written answer to an arranged Parliamentary Question on this matter. He is anxious to make his reply before the Recess, and before he answers oral questions on Thursday 29 July (tomorrow). He is, therefore, anxious to give the written answer today.

--- 2. I enclose a draft of the answer, which is an amended version of a draft prepared in the Northern Ireland Office. You may wish to show it to the Prime Minister.

ROBERT ARMSTRONG
(Approved by Sir Robert Armstrong
and signed in his absence)

28 July 1982Note.

The Prime Minister decides in his own to
support the changes to the text shown working.

DRAFTThe Sloan Affair: Draft Written Answer to Arranged PQ

Q. To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the right hon Member for South Down has provided evidence to substantiate the account he gave on the 29th June of a conversation between a Northern Ireland Office civil servant and an academic researcher.

A. No. The right hon Member quoted, ~~(as if it were an authoritative record)~~, from a typescript purporting to record in direct speech Mr Abbott's answers to questions put to him by an academic researcher. It emerged that the typescript was a summary prepared by the researcher from notes taken during the interviews ~~and was not authorised by or agreed with Mr Abbott,~~ ~~who denies that it constitutes a remotely accurate record of his answers.~~

2. The right hon Member stated that his hon Friend, the Member for Antrim South, would send the Prime Minister "all relevant particulars and identifications". The hon Member's letter to No 10 contained ~~nothing more of substance than~~ the plain paper typescript already distributed to some Members of the House - and three additional sentences presented as a quotation from a further talk with Mr Abbott on the 17th November 1981 - together with the name of the researcher who was said to be prepared to make himself available to verify the information contained in his notes.

3. / The hon Member for Antrim South wrote on 15th July that he and the right hon Member for South Down would be available separately to offer evidence and information and were asked to send me as soon as possible any relevant evidence or information they possessed which had been omitted from the letter of 29th June./

4. The researcher has accordingly been interviewed. He explained that, in October 1980 he started work, which he emphasised was not paid work, on a series of research projects for the hon Member for Antrim South. He explained that he was a graduate research student who since 1978 had been engaged on research into United States foreign policy since 1945, and that it was in connection with that work that in January 1981 he wrote to the Northern Ireland Office seeking an interview which took place with Mr Abbott on 26th January 1981. He also said that in 1979 he had offered to do research work for the hon Member for Antrim South. This offer was accepted in October 1980, and he had since undertaken a number of research projects for the hon Member. He stated that his approach to the Northern Ireland Office in January 1981 was in no way connected with those projects and was made without the knowledge of the hon Member. He did not mention his work for the hon Member in the course of his three interviews and correspondence with Northern Ireland Office officials. He confirmed that the interview notes were his own summary of points made by Mr Abbott in an interview which lasted more than an hour. He made longhand notes while Mr Abbott was speaking, elaborated these notes the same evening on his return to university, and wrote up the summary account quoted by the right Hon Member the following day. He sent a copy of his notes to the hon Member for Antrim South in May 1982. He did not bring his longhand notes to the recent interview. When asked to make them available he agreed to do so, but nothing further has yet been received. Although that typescript appears to be a verbatim record, even to the extent of including the words "Phone rings" as an interruption in one of Mr Abbott's replies, the researcher stated that the notes were not a verbatim record. He maintained that, save for one or two manifest inaccuracies which he was prepared to acknowledge, the notes were an accurate record of what Mr Abbott said. When his attention was drawn to the inaccuracies and absurdities on matters of fact which were pointed out in the House, he maintained that they were correctly attributed to Mr Abbott.

5. Mr Abbott has also been interviewed in the light of this discussion with the researcher concerned. He continues to assert that the notes are incomplete and misleading or inaccurate to such an extent that they bear little relationship to what he had said to the researcher. I have no reason to doubt the integrity of Mr Abbott or to disbelieve his denial of having made the crucial remarks attributed to him. Moreover, from the internal evidence of the purported record itself, and given the way in which it was prepared and the failure to check it with Mr Abbott either at the time or subsequently it cannot in any way be regarded as a reliable account in detail or in substance.

6. Nothing has been produced to alter the view I expressed on 29th June when the allegations were made that they were unjustified and irresponsible.